

Introduction to product management

What is product?

Let's talk about vocabulary.

product

noun

anything that can be offered to a market that might satisfy a want or need¹

¹ P. Kotler : Kellogg School of Management

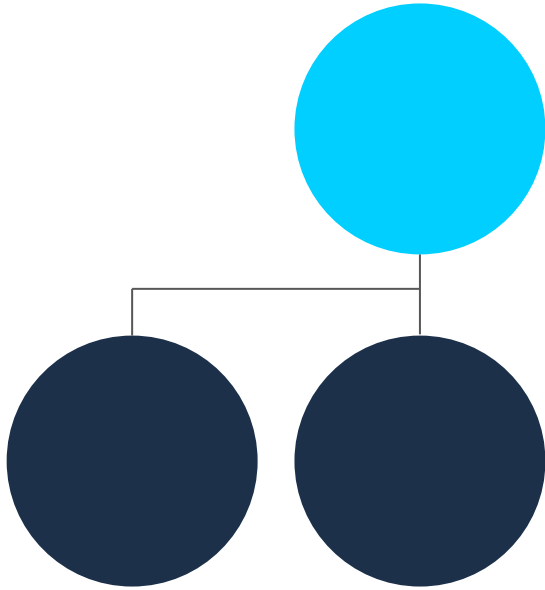
product manager

noun

a person who leads subject matter experts in an interdisciplinary team to envision and deliver products¹

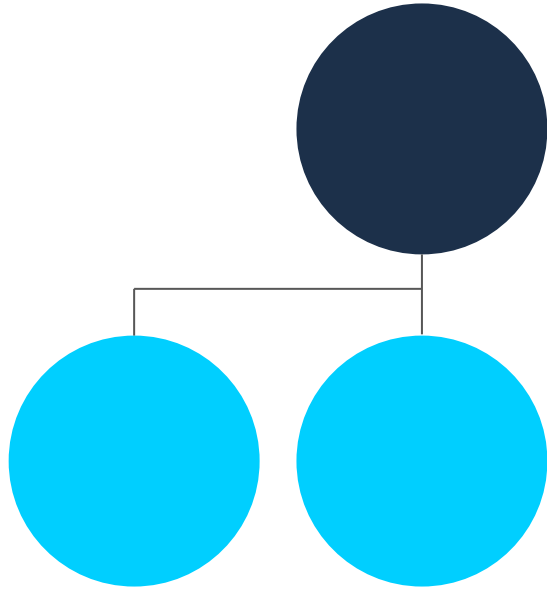
¹ N. Lee : 18F

Product managers can be supervisors



drives a sophisticated vision, manages complex stakeholder relationships

Or individual contributors



drives a sophisticated vision, manages complex stakeholder relationships

drives a localized vision, manages an interdisciplinary team

It's all product!

It's all Product!

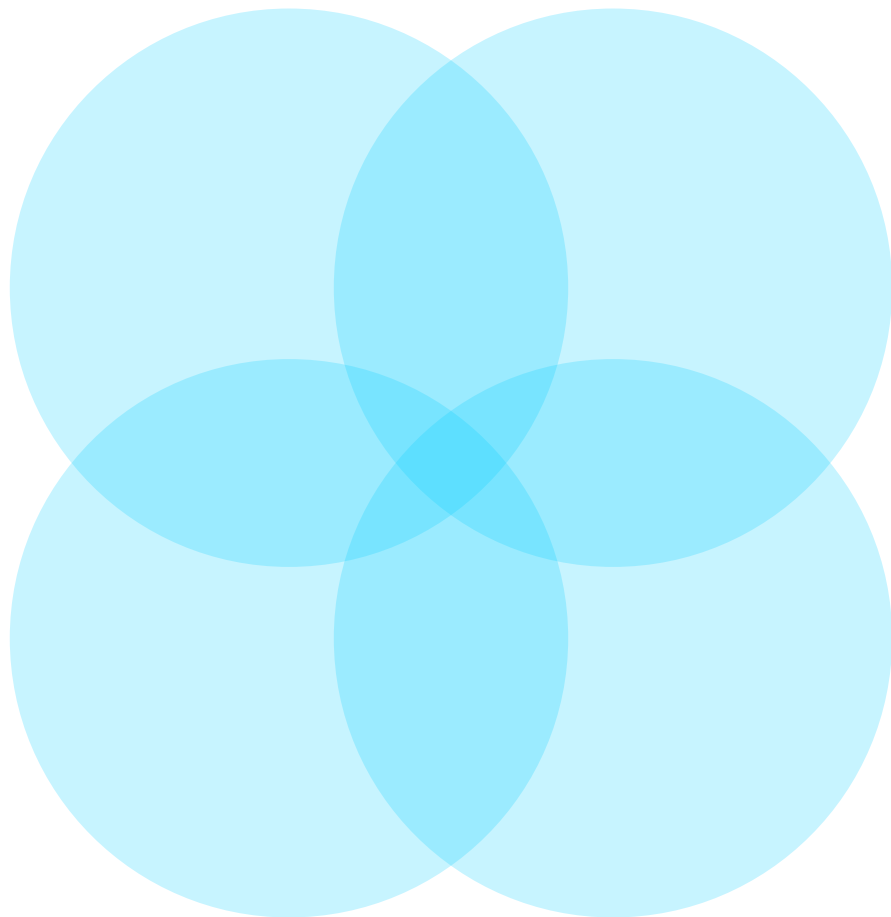
So... what do all these product people do?

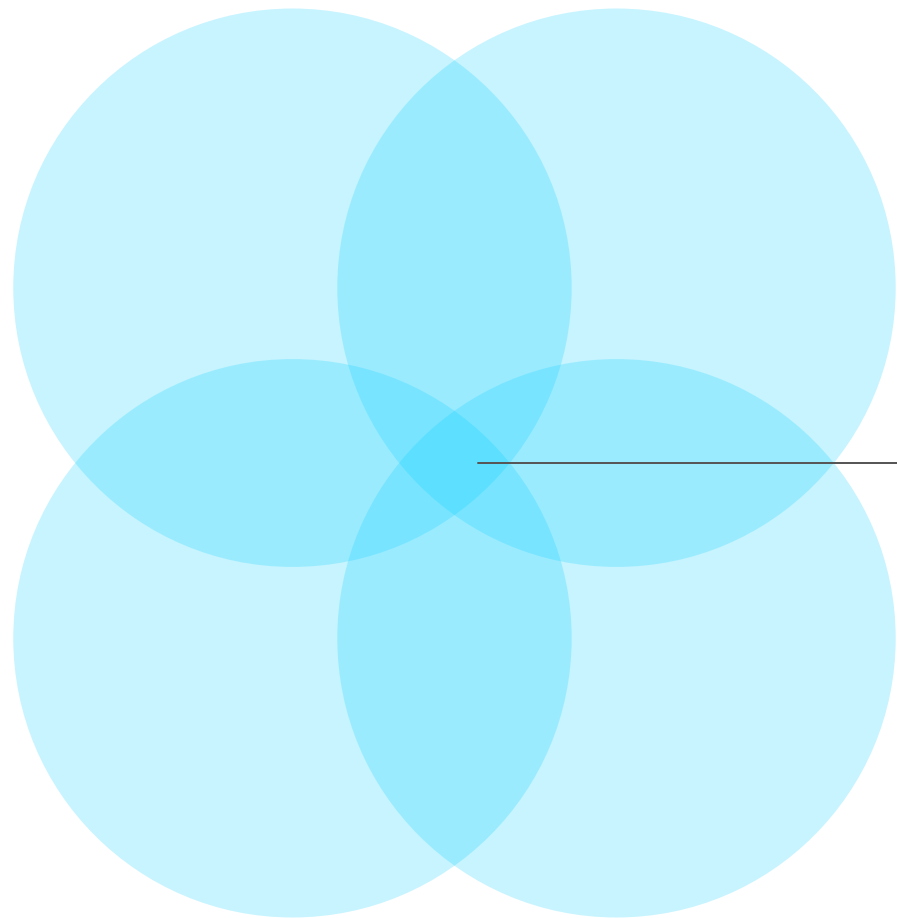
user need

stakeholders

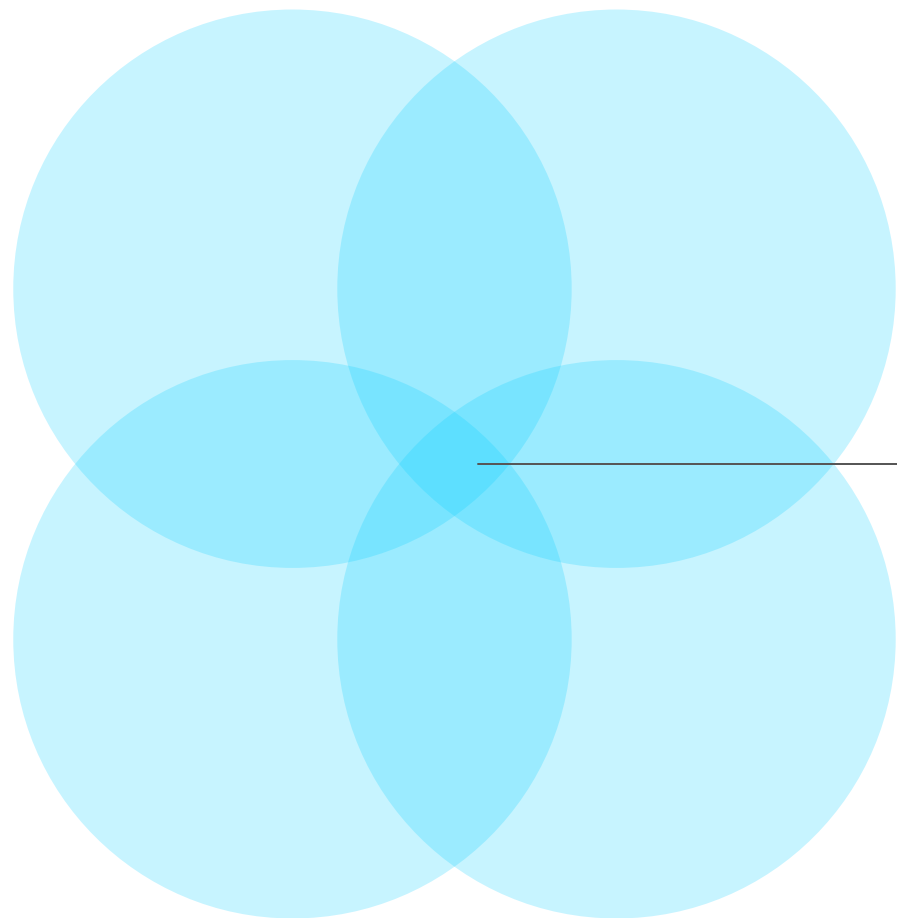
technology

business

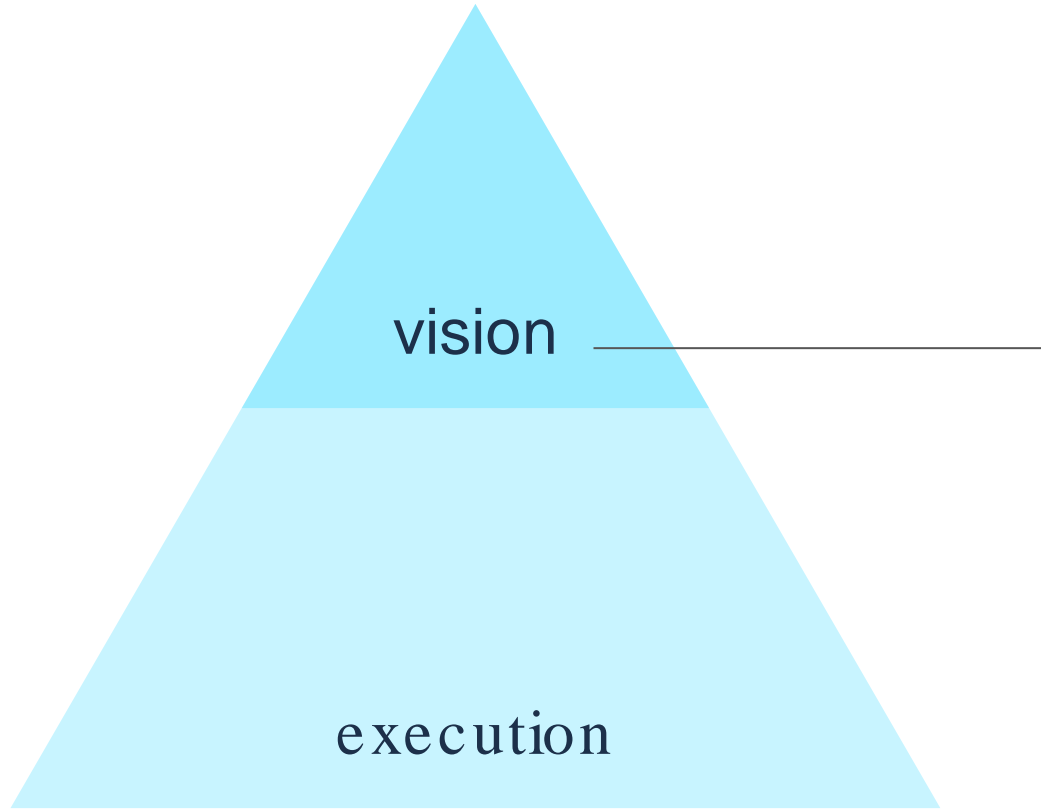




Product managers sit
at the intersection of
design+research,
development,
business, policy, and
politics.

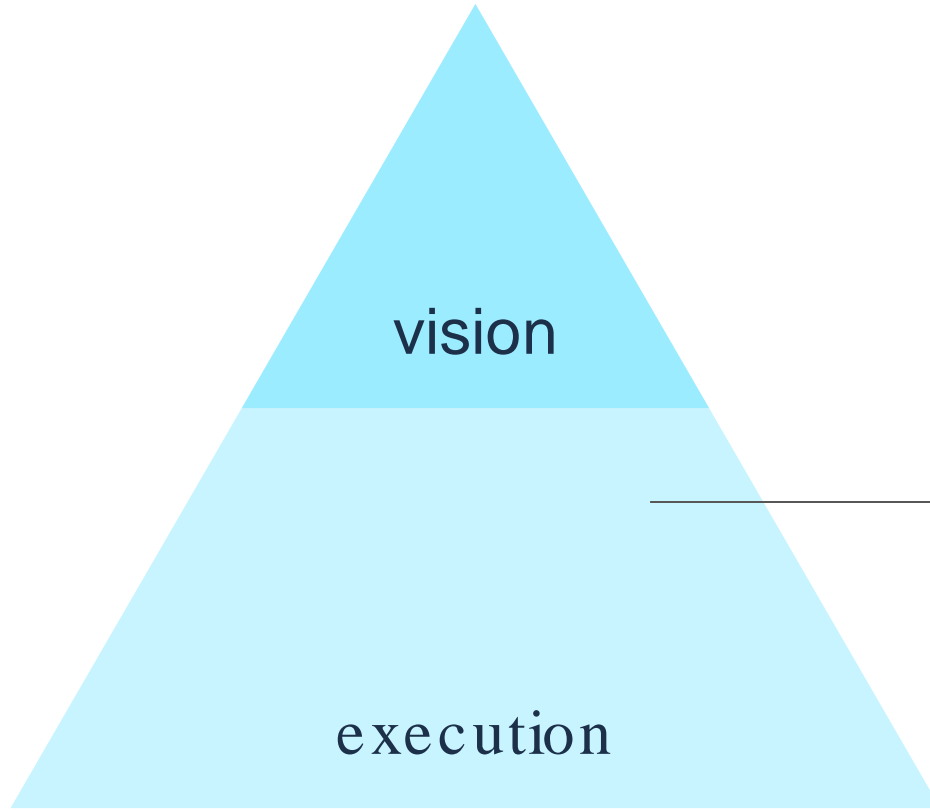


Product managers sit at the intersection of design+research, development, business, policy, and politics. They are a bridge across all of those groups.



Product uses that positioning to answer two questions:

1. What should we do?



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1. What should we do?
2. How do we get there?

Strategy without tactics is just a pipe dream. Tactics without strategy is a nightmare.

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Product managers are the glue that binds the two.

Ok, but... what
does that mean?

Product managers wrangle team members and stakeholders to create a **shared vision**, then communicate it internally and externally.

Product managers are responsible for the **strategy, roadmap, and feature definition** of a product or product line.

Product managers may also do marketing, forecasting, and profit and loss (P&L).

Product managers are always focused on **delivering the right solution** (bought or built) for the right market.

Product managers are not:

Project managers

Scrum masters

Agile coaches

Engagement managers

Designers

Researchers

Strategists

Coffee getters

Note takers

Developers

Data scientists

Security experts

Infrastructure experts

Marketers

PR people

Salespeople

The team's psychologist

The team's parent

However, product managers *sometimes* play one or more of these roles **in order to fill a need** on the team (sometimes the team *really* needs a scrum master and some coffee).

What is product accountable for?

Product folks own four questions:

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1. What's the problem we're solving?
(and why does it matter?)

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(and why does it matter?)
- 2. What will our impact be?**

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2. What will our impact be?
3. How are we doing it?

Product folks own four questions:

1. What's the problem we're solving?
(and why does it matter?)
2. What will our impact be?
3. How are we doing it?
- 4. Is our solution good?**

Product teams have to be able to provide good answers to all of these questions.

Product teams have to be able to provide good answers to all of these questions. **When the answer is “we don’t know”, they need to have a concrete plan to get to an answer.**

Getting concrete about roles

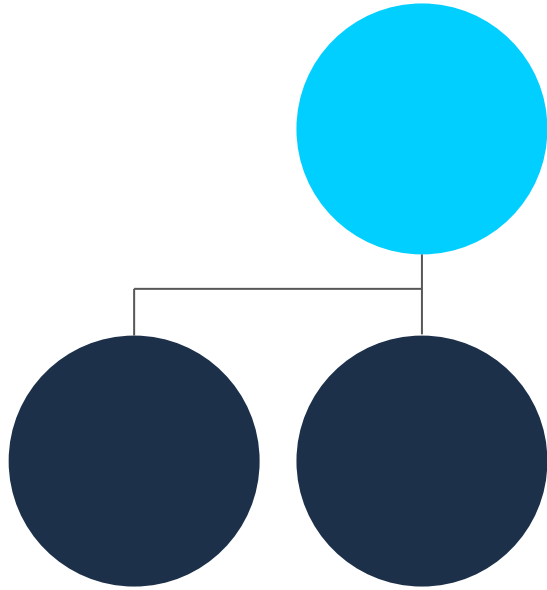
What should product managers create?

- Clear vision statement for their area of ownership
- Key Performance Indicators for their area of ownership
- Prioritized and stack ranked list of feature areas/modules within their area of ownership
- An actionable product backlog for the team
- A product roadmap for upcoming milestones
- Product quality, testing, and bug triage process/practice

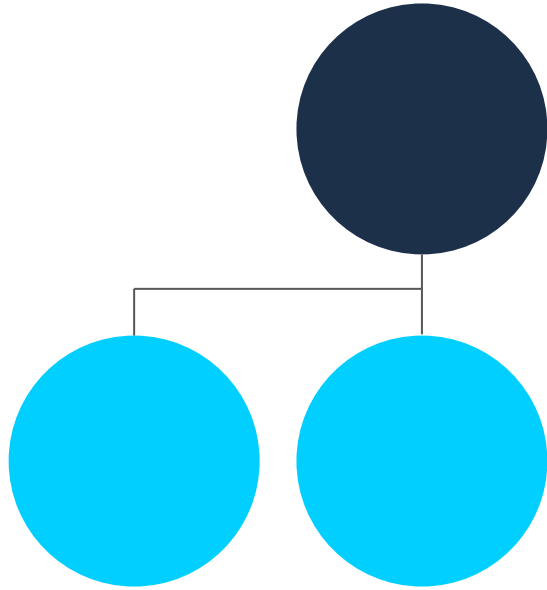
What should product managers be able to tell you about?

- Pros and cons of their vision and how it supports the overall organization vision
- Key questions, decision points, and concerns within their area of ownership
- Project trajectory and status of research, design, and development
- Status of stakeholders and internal partners
- Their plans to correct any blockers or red flags in any of these areas
- Any areas where they need additional support or resources

**The role changes at different levels
within the organization.**



broader scope, more complex
stakeholder relationships, less day-to-
day technical work



narrower scope, less stakeholder interaction, more time helping the delivery team with day-to-day work

Reflection



1

What is your product?



2

What are your hopes and fears for your role? Do you have what you need?



3

What are your hopes and fears for your product?

The product process

Let's talk about process

The PM process isn't a series of linear steps. It's more like a set of **mental states** that have logical tasks associated with them.

***Projects* have a natural beginning, middle, and end.**

As their projects move through this cycle, *PMs* bounce between high-level vision, day-to-day building, and shipping*.

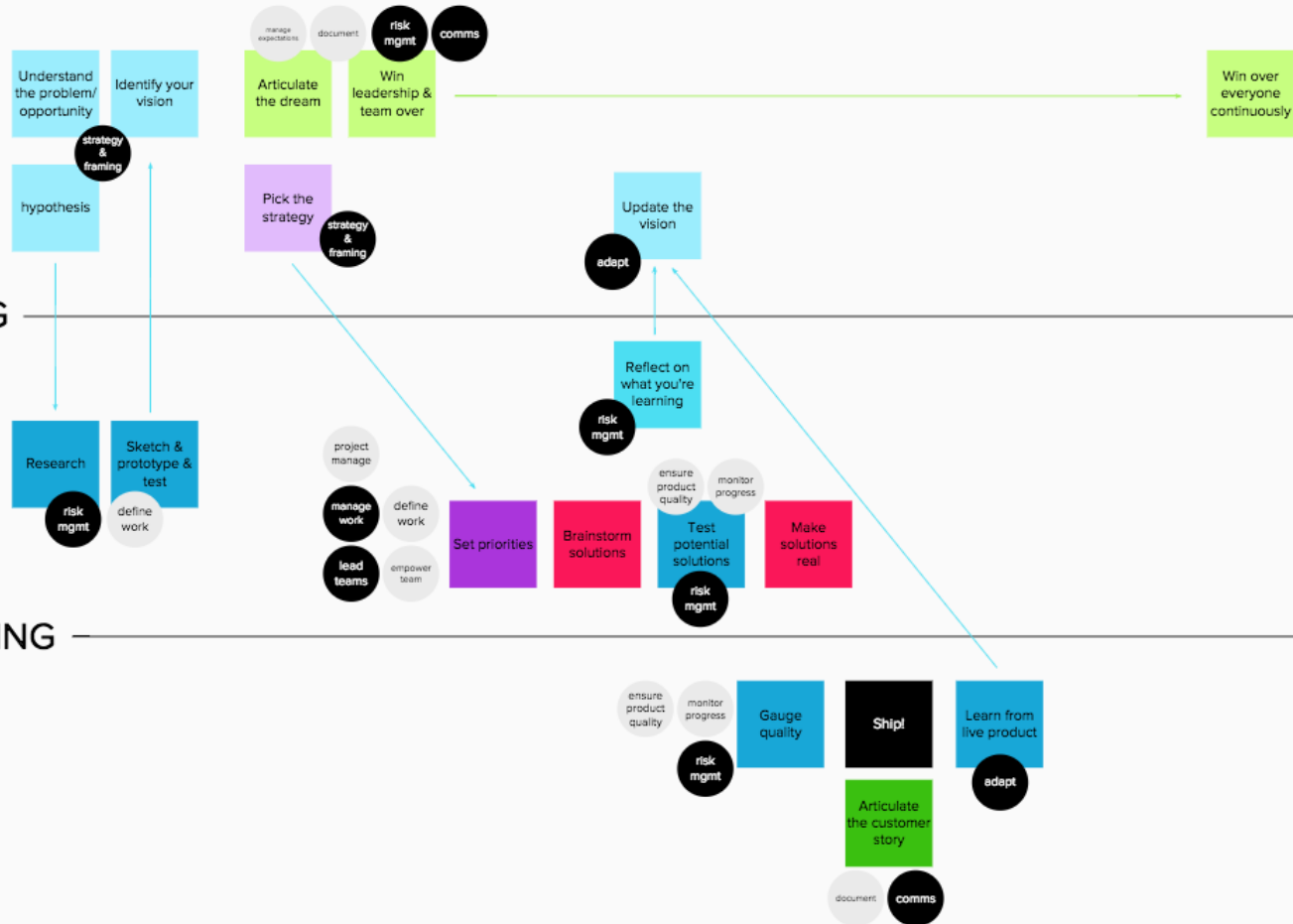
shipping varies from project to project — in long waterfall cycles it's a major production; in an agile DevOps environment it's a daily occurrence

This can all be captured in a really complicated diagram:

VISION

DOING

SHIPPING



It captures six mental states that PMs bounce between.

time 

understand

time



understand plan

time



understand plan build

time



understand plan build **deploy**

time 

communicate

understand

plan

build

deploy

learn

time



So if we map those against the different zoom levels of work we outlined...

vision 

building 

shipping 

understand

vision

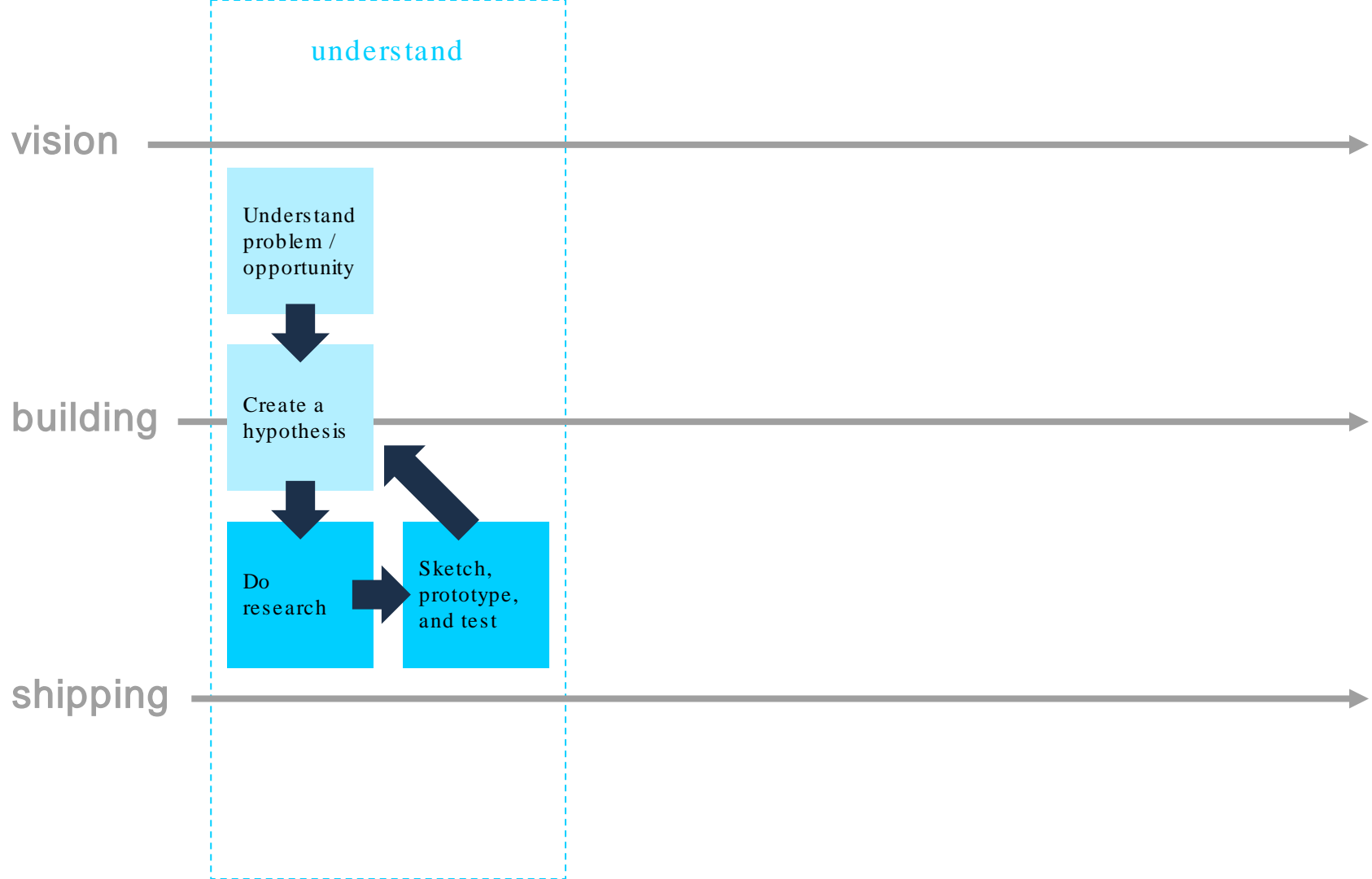


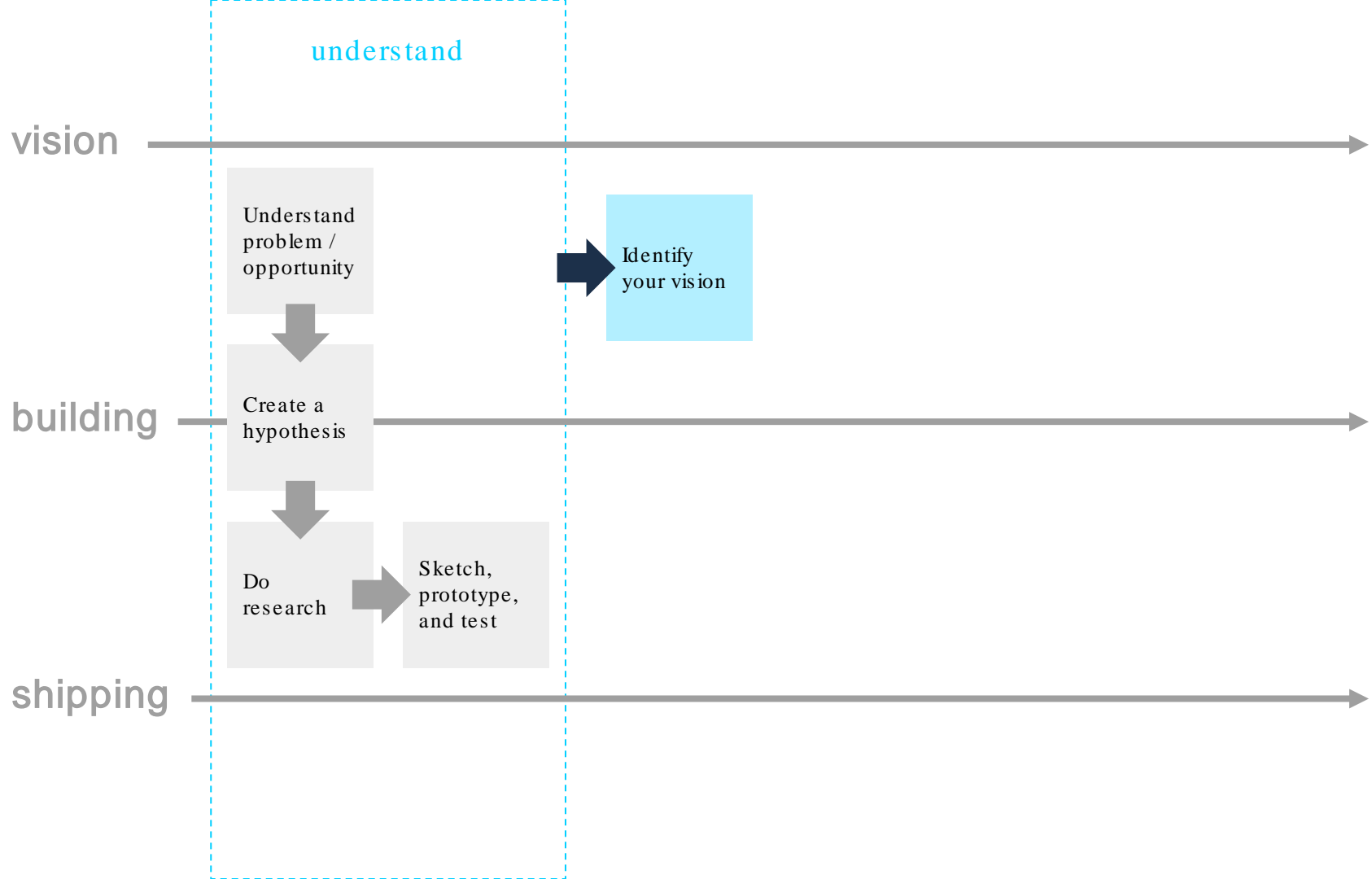
building

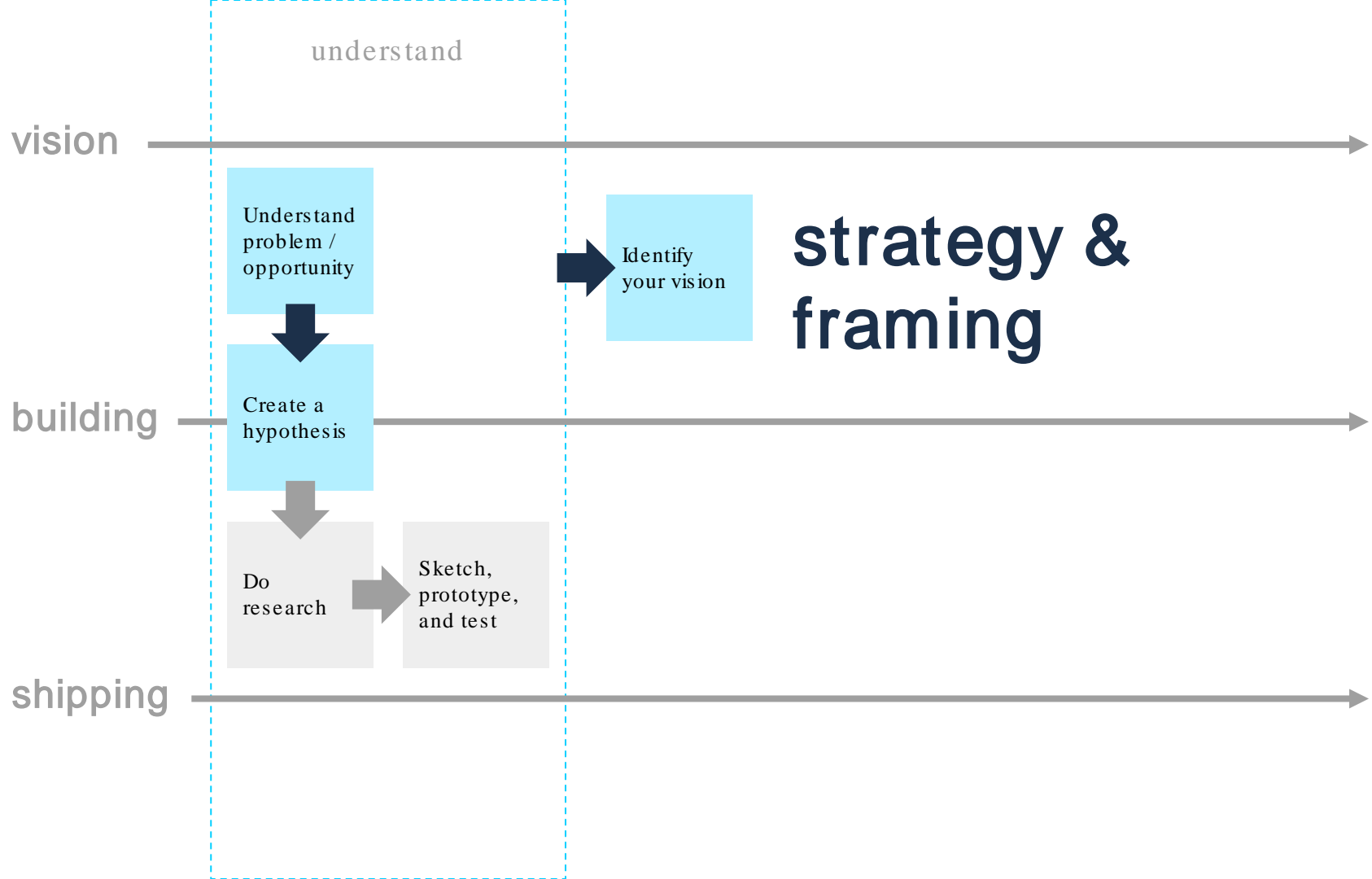


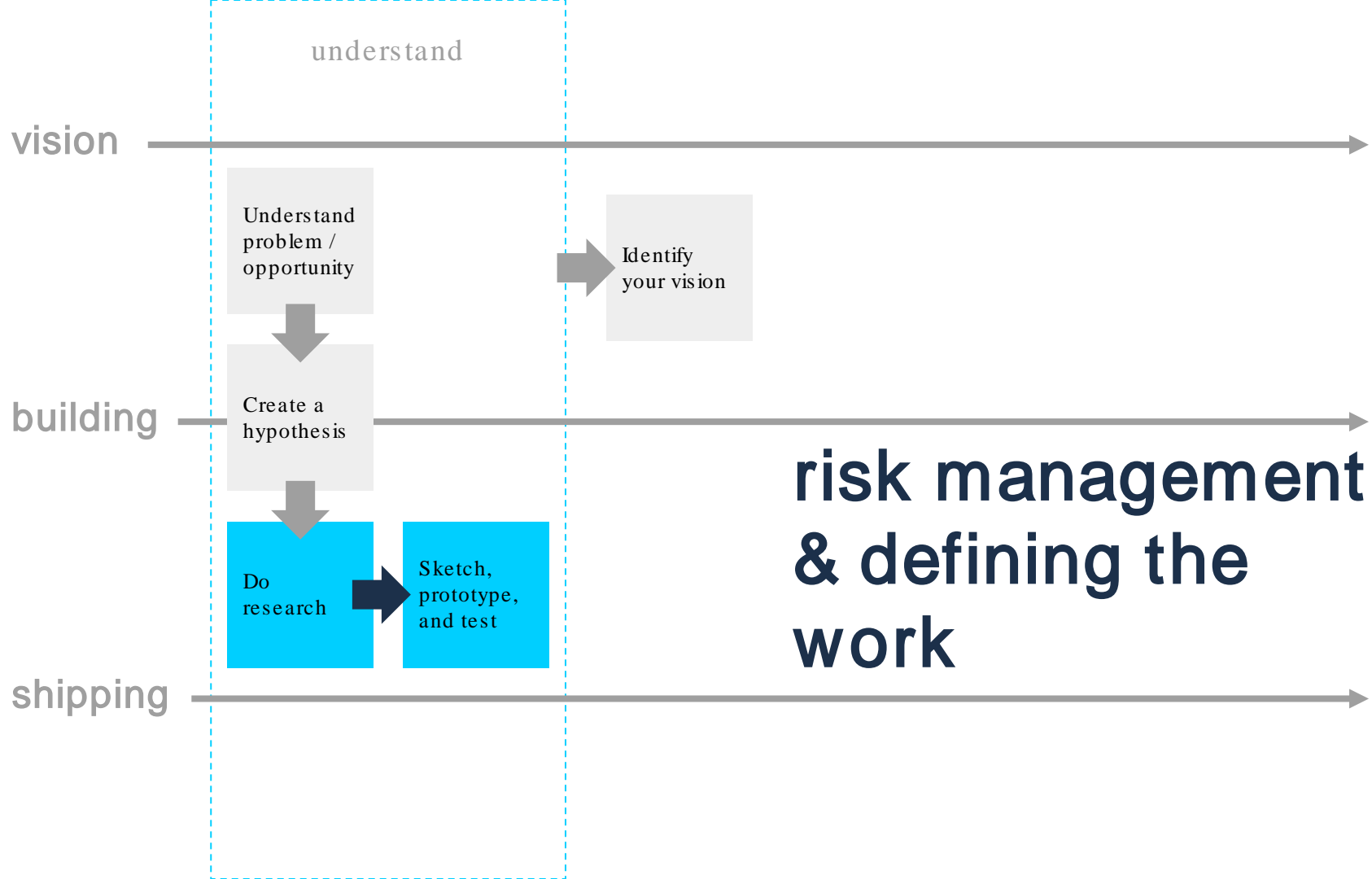
shipping











plan

vision

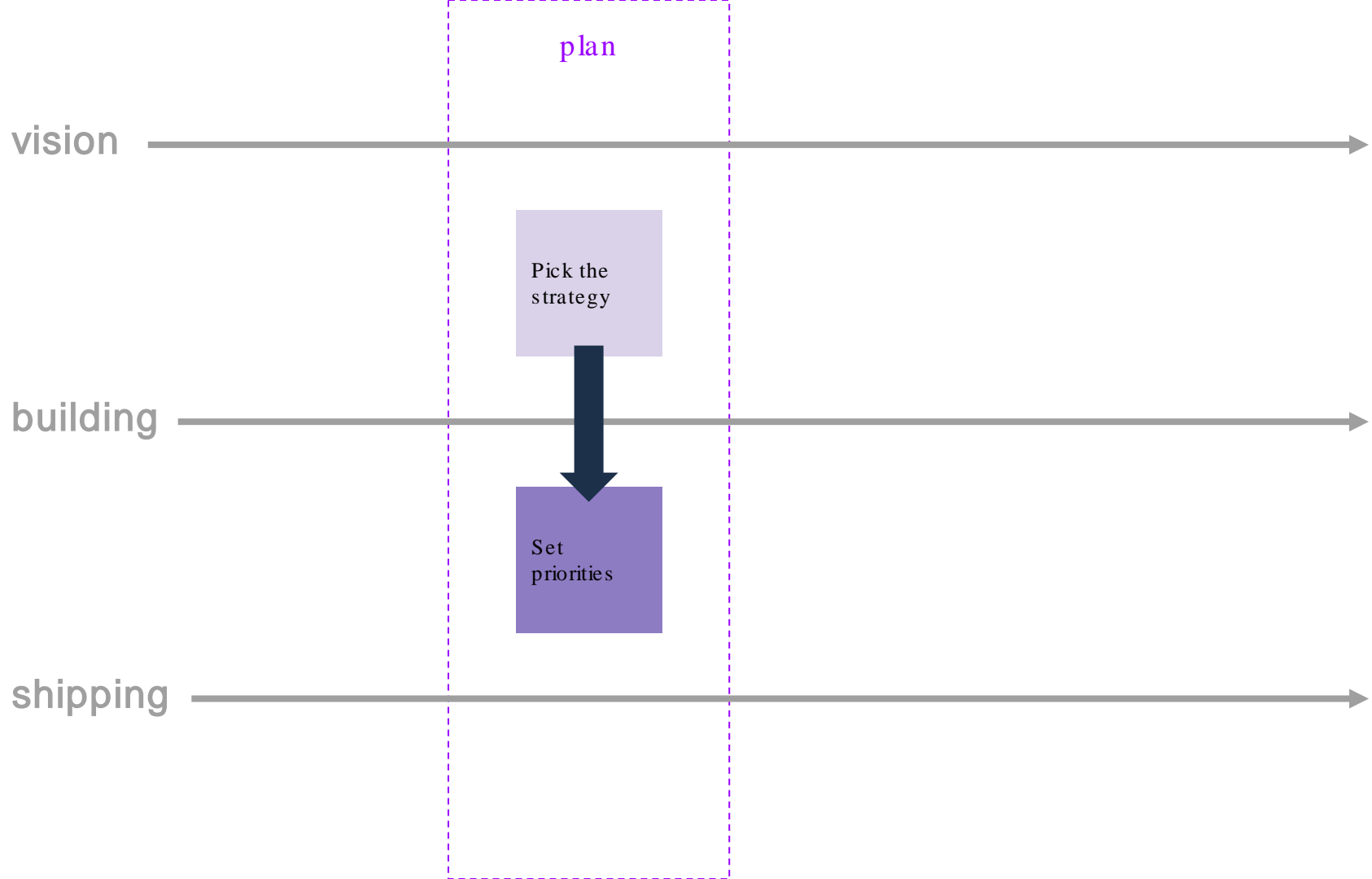


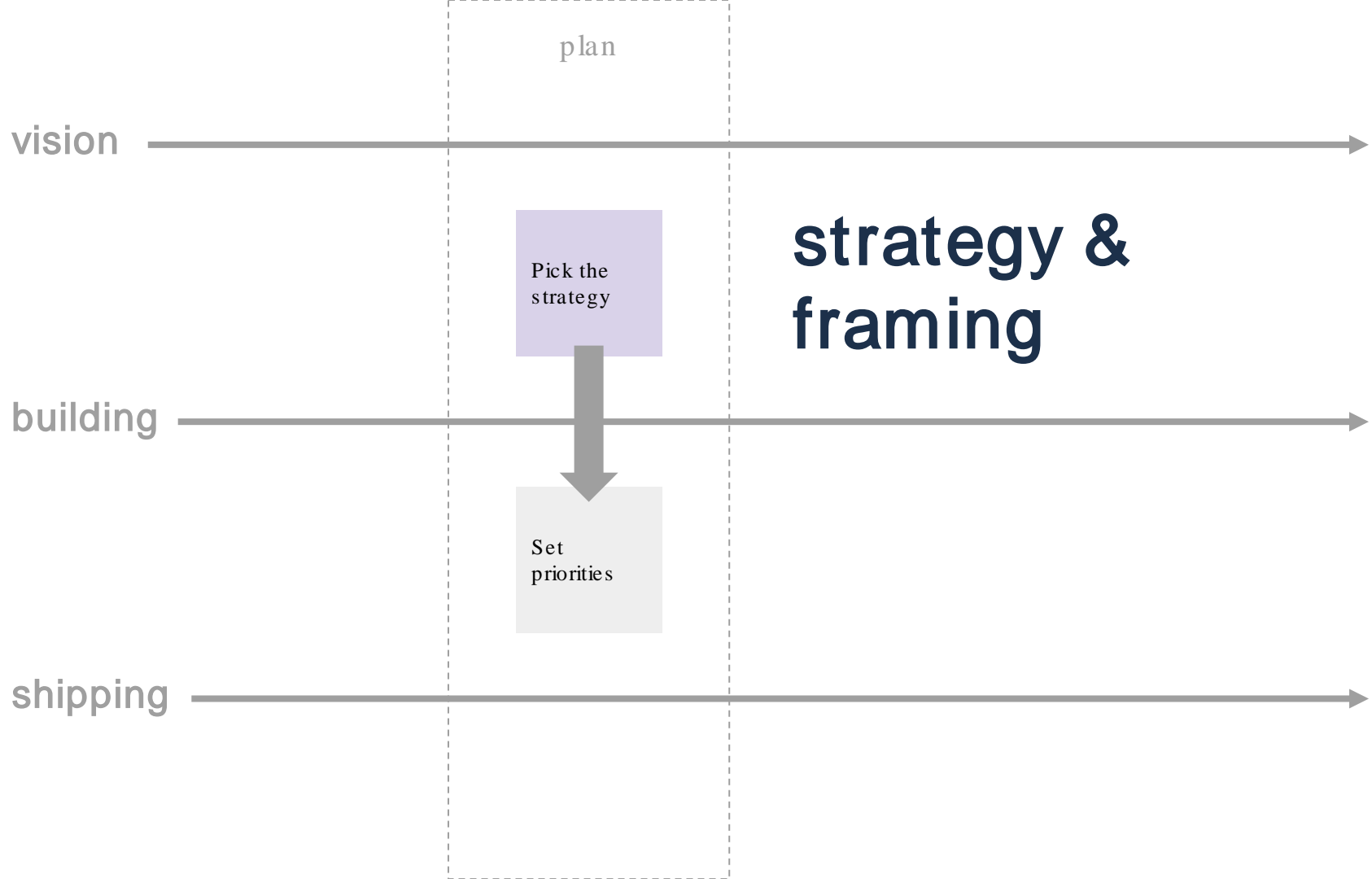
building

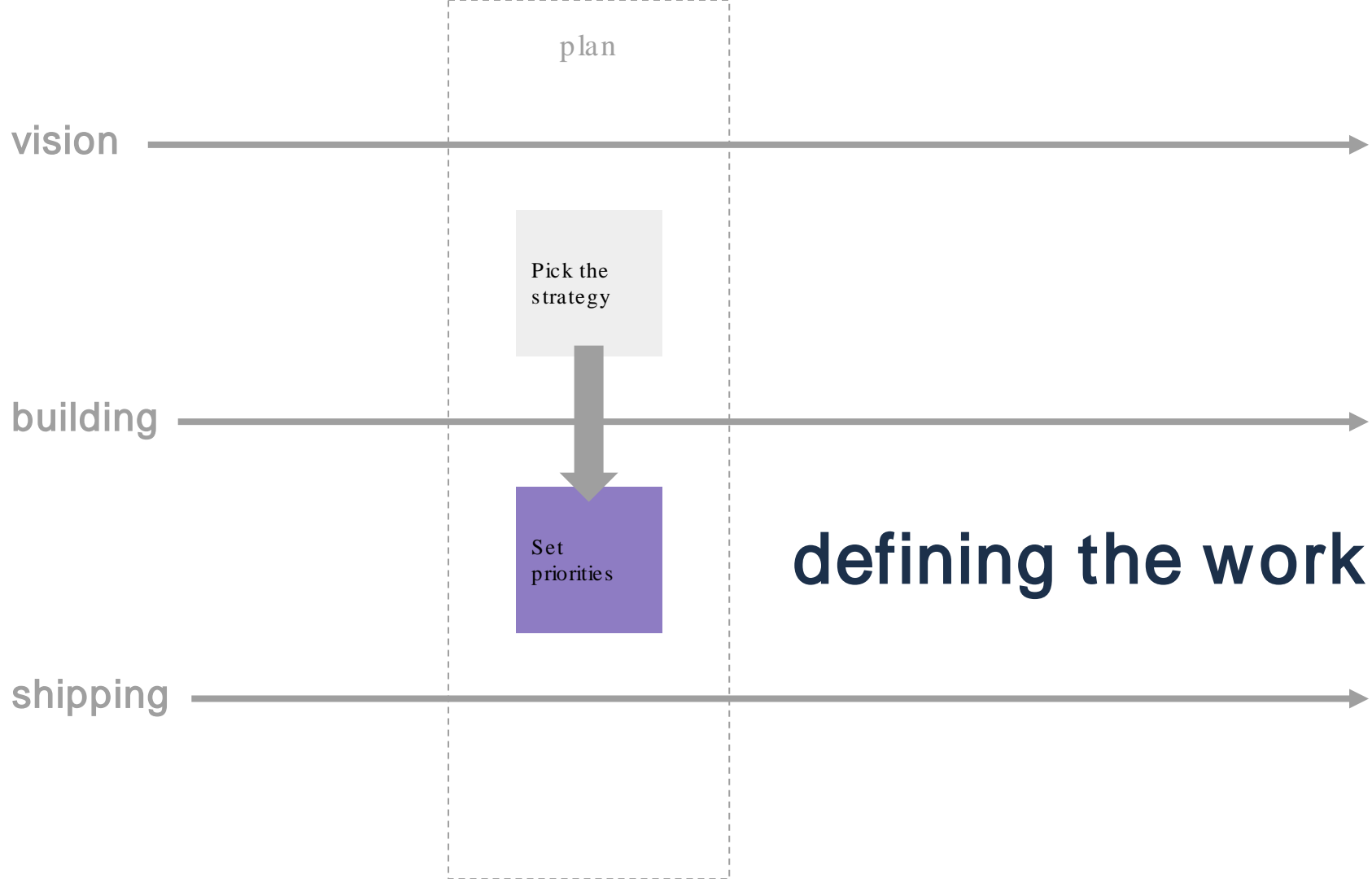


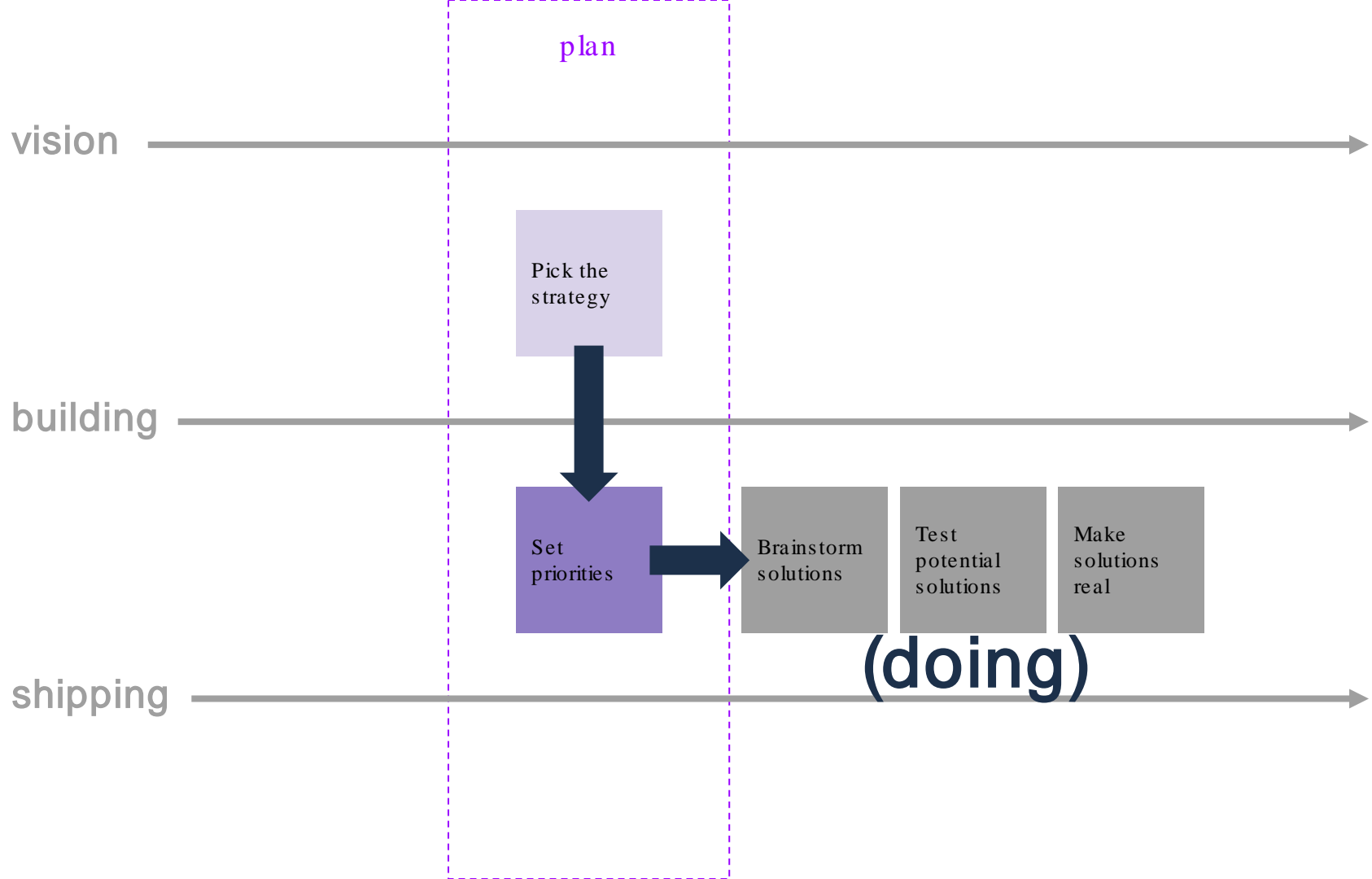
shipping





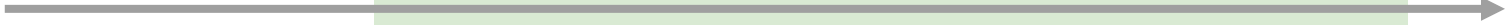






communicate

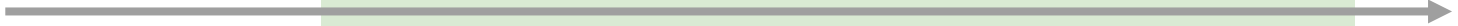
vision



building



shipping



communicate

vision



Articulate
the dream



Win initial
buy-in



Continuously win over everyone

building



shipping



communicate

vision



Articulate
the dream



Win initial
buy-in



Continuously win over everyone

building



**risk management
& communication**

shipping



build

vision



building



shipping

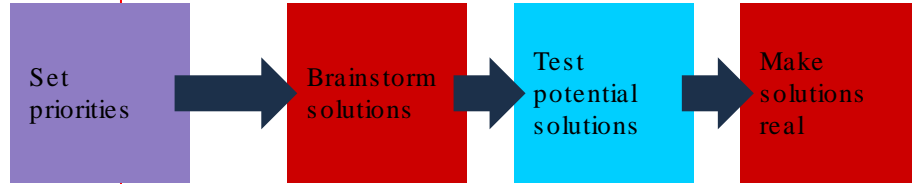


build

vision

building

shipping

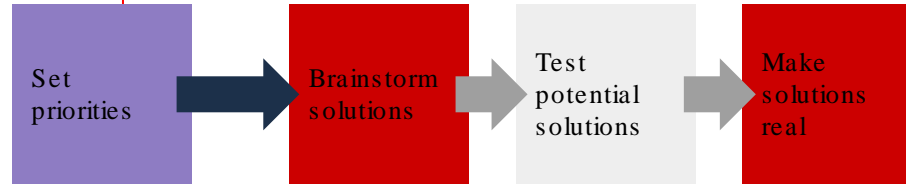


build

vision

leadership & project management

building



shipping

understand

vision

Update the
vision

**adapt
(& manage
risk)**

Reflect on
what you're
learning

building

Set
priorities

Brainstorm
solutions

Test
potential
solutions

Make
solutions
real

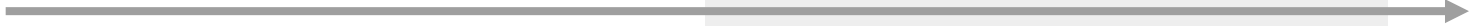
shipping

ship

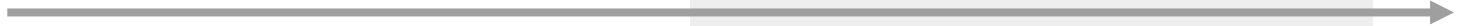
vision

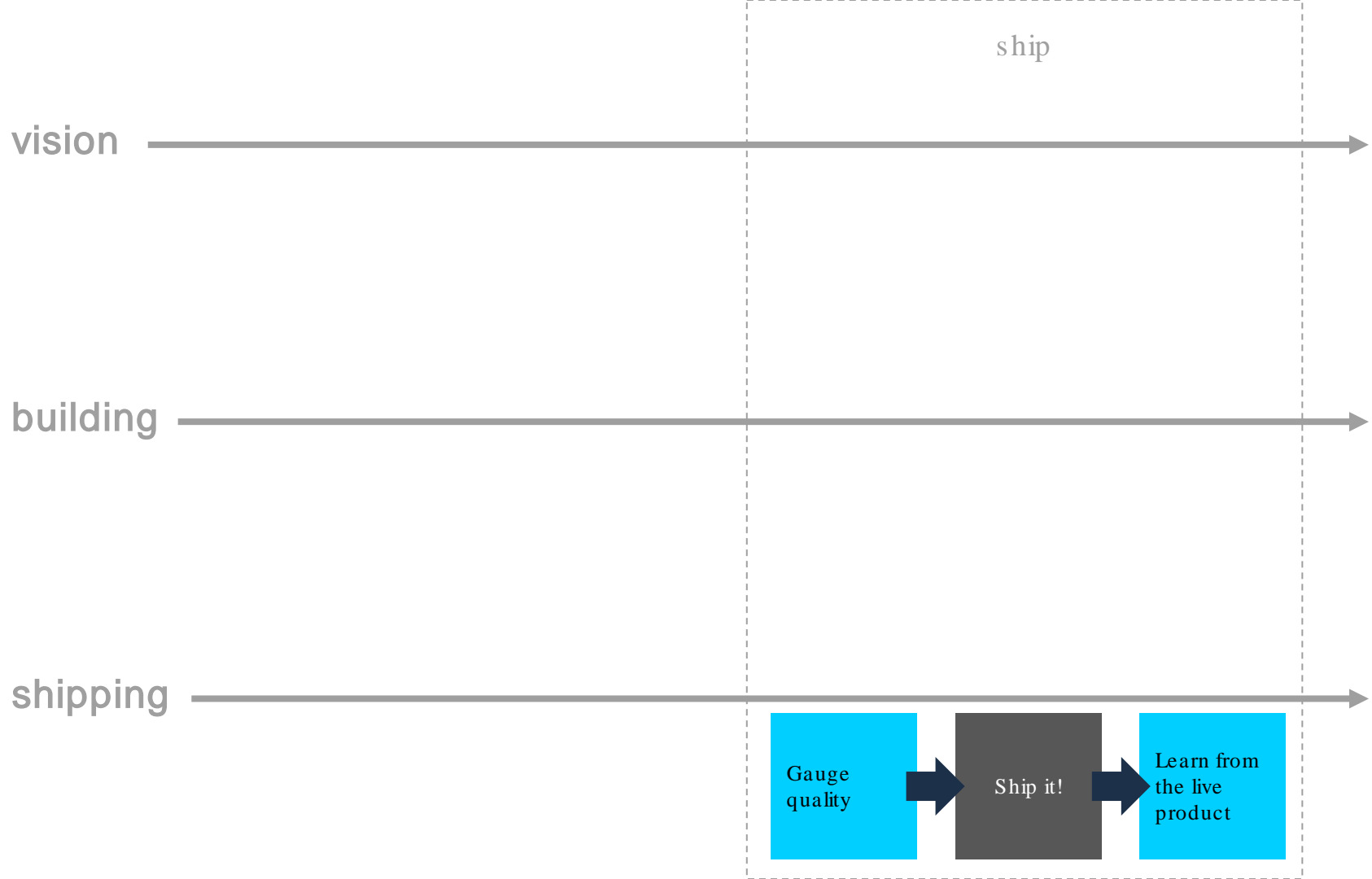


building



shipping





vision



building



shipping



ship

**ensure quality &
manage risk**

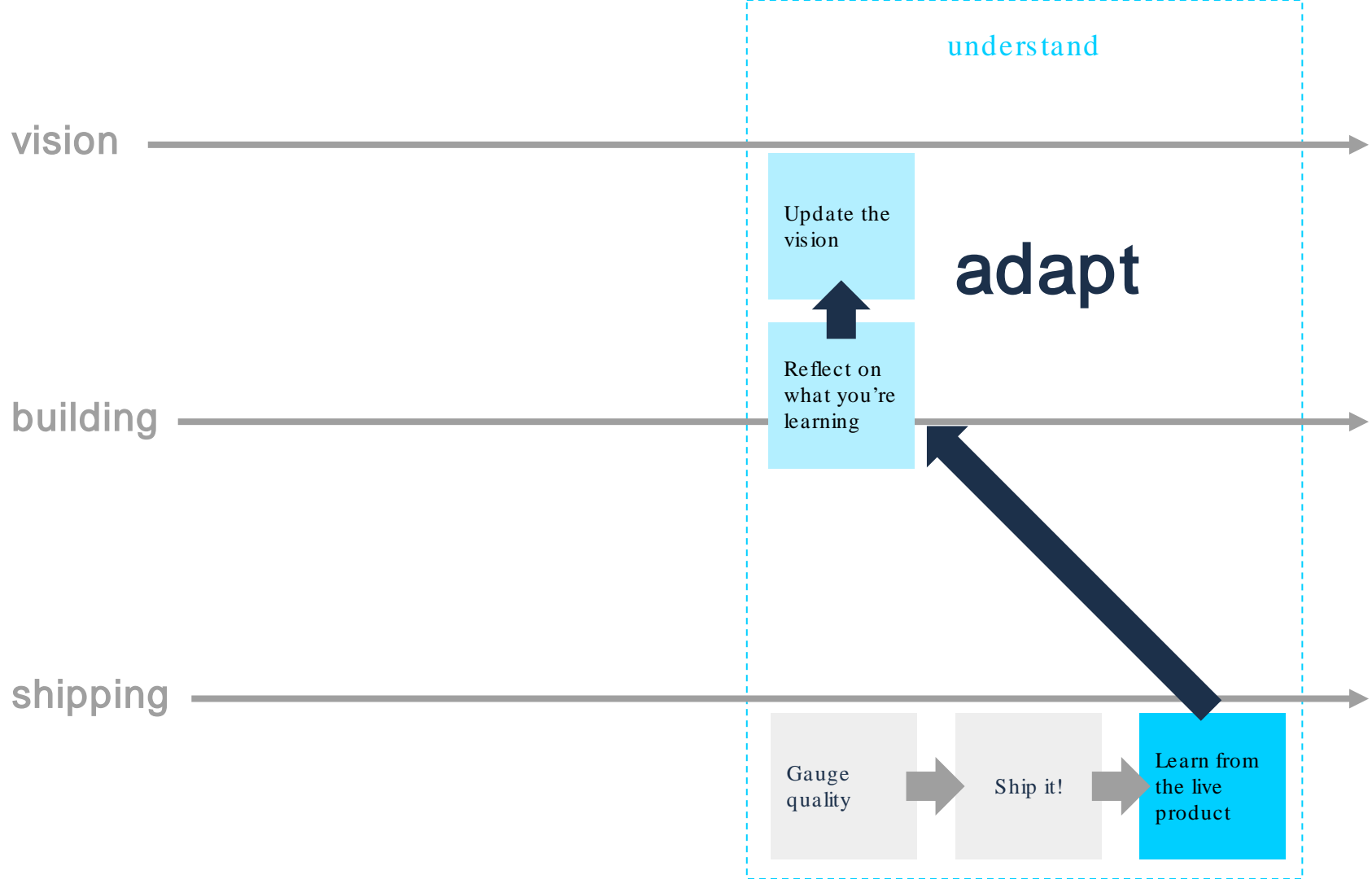
Gauge
quality

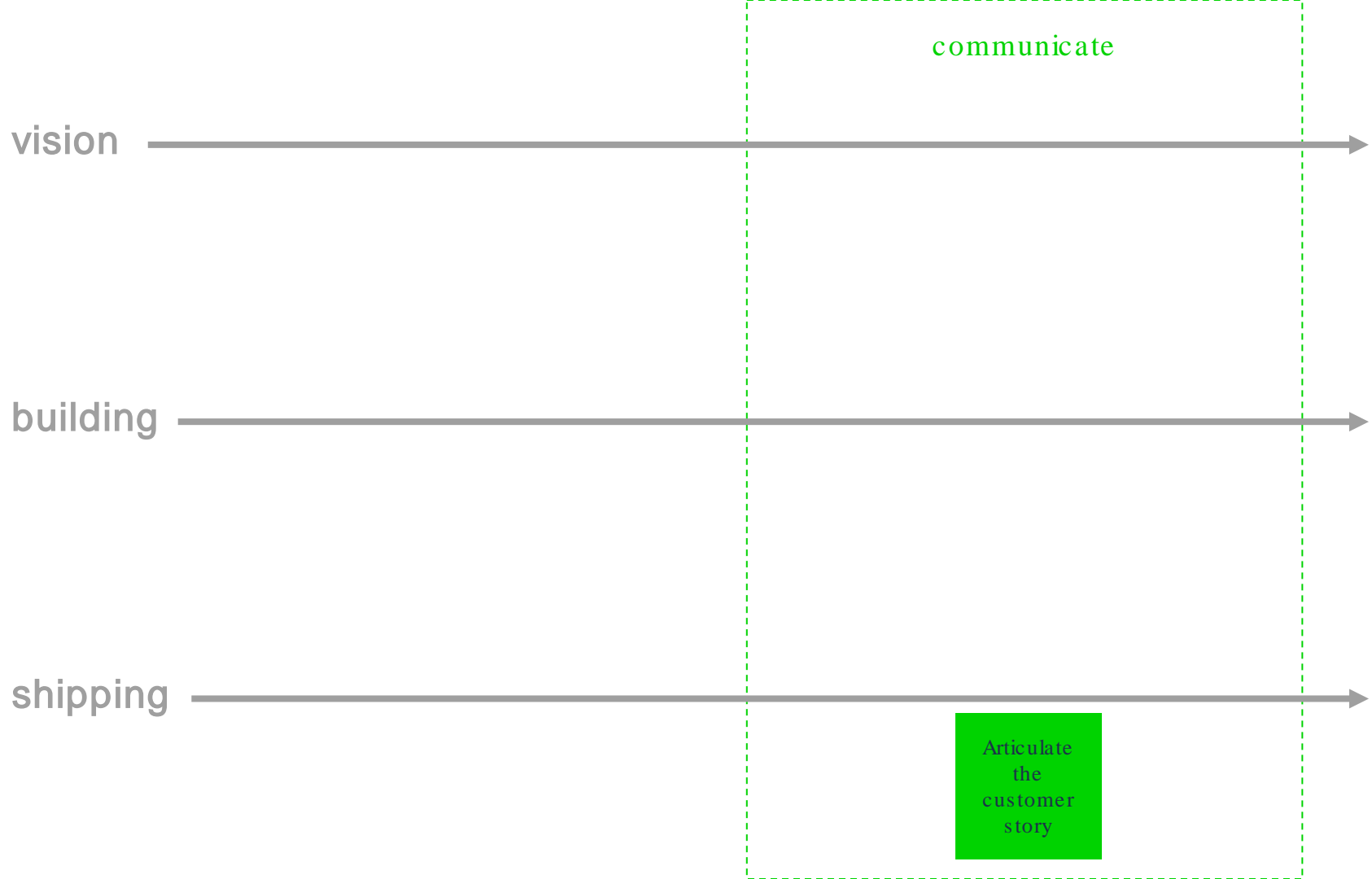


Ship it!



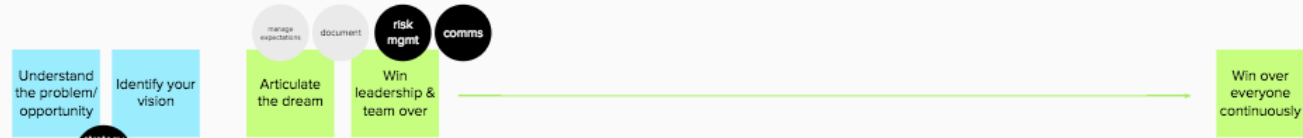
Learn from
the live
product



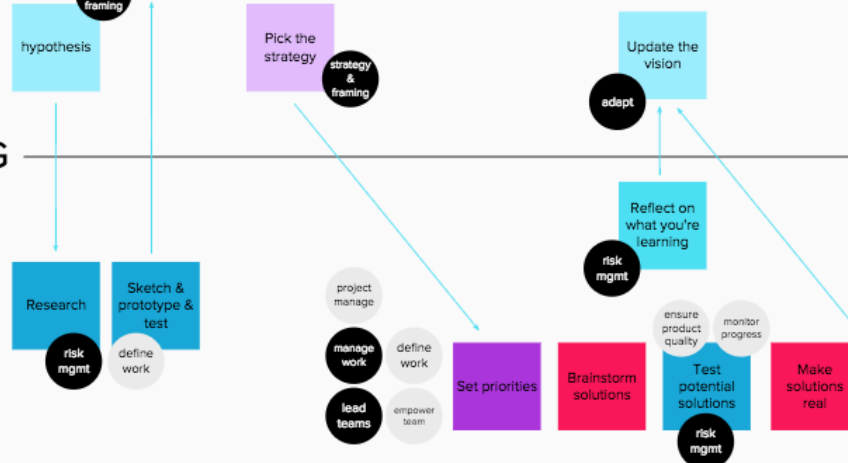


**Now that we have some context,
let's look at that diagram again...**

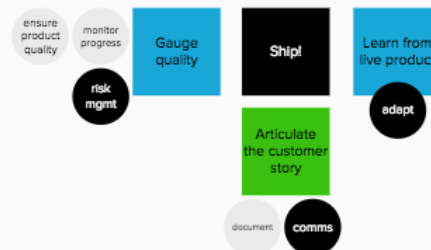
VISION



DOING



SHIPPING



We talked about the skills that product managers have:

- * strategy & framing**
- * communication**
- * leadership**
- * risk management**
- * adaptability (to handle new info)**

And the work that they do:

- * defining the work
- * empowering the team
- * managing expectations
- * monitoring progress and quality
- * project management

What does product need to succeed?

What does product
need from
leadership?

What does product need to succeed?

How leadership supports product

1

A clear vision

2

Good
feedback

3

The right
people

4

Policy &
practice

5

Empowerment

1\ a clear vision

**Product managers need to know
where the organization is going.**

Product managers need to know
where the organization is going.

**They need a vision to rally around,
and it has to be one they can believe
in.**

Key questions:

Why are we here?

Where are we going to be in 5 years?

In 10 years?

2\ good feedback

Product managers need feedback on their vision.

Product managers need feedback on their vision. **They need a push to be ambitious.**

Product managers need feedback on their vision. They need a push to be ambitious. **They need questions when people don't understand what they're talking about or how their team is doing.**

Product managers can't afford to lose the big picture. They need an anchor to the mission, so that nobody gets lost in the details.

3\ the right people

**Product managers are team players.
They need great teams!**

4\ policy & practice

Software alone is not enough.

Software alone is not enough. To
**fulfill our mission we must shape
policy and practice.**

Software alone is not enough. To fulfill our mission we must shape policy and practice. **Product managers are perfectly positioned to see where policy, practice, and technology collide.**

Product managers need leadership to help them set, and fulfill, a strategy for driving policy.

5\ empowerment

Product managers need to ask hard questions, take initiative, and push boundaries.

Product managers need to ask hard questions, take initiative, and push boundaries. **They must have the space to do that.**

Product is hard. There will be mistakes. **That has to be ok.**

“I didn’t fail. I found 10,000 ways that didn’t work.”

— T. Edison

**What does product
need from the
team?**

What does product need to succeed?

How the team supports product

1

Respect

2

Critical
thinking

3

Patience

4

Passion

5

1\ respect

Product managers have to make a lot of tough decisions.

Product managers have to make a lot of tough decisions. **They have to balance input from disparate sources.**

Product managers have to make a lot of tough decisions. They have to balance input from disparate sources. **It's not always immediately obvious why they made a particular decision.**

Product managers should explain decisions to their team.

The team needs to give them a chance to do that.

2\ critical thinking

**Respect is not the same as
obedience.**

Respect is not the same as obedience. Asking questions and challenging decisions can be a form of respect.

In fact, product managers **need** an engaged team that thinks critically about their work and how it supports the end goal.

Ultimately, product managers care about outcomes. If there's a better way to get to the outcome, they want to hear about it!

3\ patience

Product managers, by nature, aren't subject matter experts in everything that the team does.

Product managers, by nature, aren't subject matter experts in everything that the team does. **However, they need to make decisions that have implications for everyone.**

It's in the best interests of the product and the team for the product manager to understand what everyone does.

Team members have to be willing to spend time explaining things until the product manager understands.

4\ passion

**Leading a disengaged team is
frustrating and depressing.**

Leading a disengaged team is frustrating and depressing. **Product managers need a team that cares — whether it's about the end goal, their craft, their teammates, or whatever else.**

**You have a product
manager shaped
hole when...**

Your meetings don't feel organized.

Your meetings don't feel organized.

Product managers help by...

Modeling and organizing productive meetings – clear goals, organization, and follow-throughs.

Your team doesn't share a clear vision.

Your team doesn't share a clear vision.

**Product managers help by...
Incorporating knowledge from the team, articulating a vision, and getting everyone aligned.**

Your team does not agree on what's important.

Your team does not agree on what's important.

Product managers help by...
Working with stakeholders and the team to align on priorities that everyone understands.

You aren't sure when something is done.

You aren't sure when something is done.

Product managers help by...

Telling you when things are ready to go (perfect is the enemy of done).

You don't have a solid customer base.

You don't have a solid customer base.

Product managers help by...
Assessing product/market fit and coming up with a plan to get customers.

You don't feel like there is a plan.

You don't feel like there is a plan.

Product managers help by...

Working with the team to create a roadmap based on a shared vision, and impact, along with clear metrics.

In other words...

**Product managers are broad, not deep.
They own the product vision and
strategy, and do what it takes to lead
teams to deliver the right product.**